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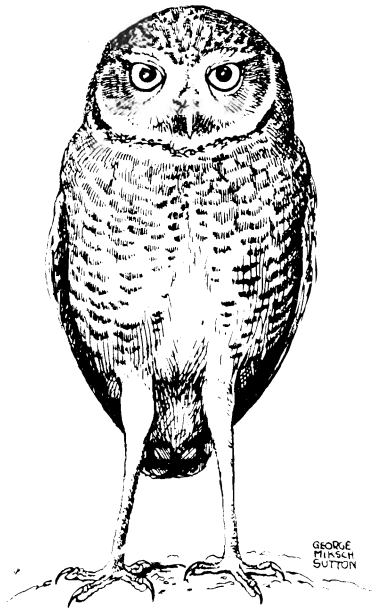

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SPRING WATERFOWL MIGRATION IN LANCASTER COUNTY - 1970

I. SPECIES COMPOSITION AND COMPARISONS WITH OTHER AREAS OF NEBRASKA

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INTRODUCTION

The seasonal reports found within the pages of the *Nebraska Bird Review* contain a wealth of useful information on the state's yearly waterfowl migration, including occurrence of species and their earliest and latest arrival dates. However, quantitative data are to be found only with those agencies concerned with management of waterfowl: the national wildlife refuges and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Finding information on relative abundance of different species of waterfowl in areas other than those containing a refuge is rarely possible.

In the spring of 1970 we attempted to document the migration of waterfowl in Lancaster County. Our goal was to discover the species composition of flocks using the reservoirs in the county and show how the relative abundance of different species changes during the progression of migration throughout the spring. We also wanted to compare our findings with records kept at selected wildlife refuges to the east and west of Lancaster County. Initially our plan included the evaluation of the effects of size and state of development of different reservoirs in the area on numbers and species of waterfowl using them, but this proved to be much too time consuming. We limited our extensive observations to one reservoir and periodically made additional visits to other reservoirs to record any noticeable differences. Data collected on observed sex ratios will be presented in another paper.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Our observations were made almost entirely on Yankee Hill Reservoir (Fig. 1), approximately five miles southwest of Lincoln, Nebraska (Section 19, T-9N, R-6E, Lancaster County). It was constructed by the Corps of Engineers and is administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. It occupies a total surface area of 210 acres and is approximately 30-35 feet deep at its maximum depth. The reservoir is fed by four tributaries to the Cardwell Branch of Salt Creek and it is at their inlets that most of the emergent vegetation is found.

The most abundant species of emergent plants found in the reservoir include swamp smartweed (*Polygonum coccineum*), bur arrowhead (*Sagittaria rigida*), and broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*). Submerged vegetation in-

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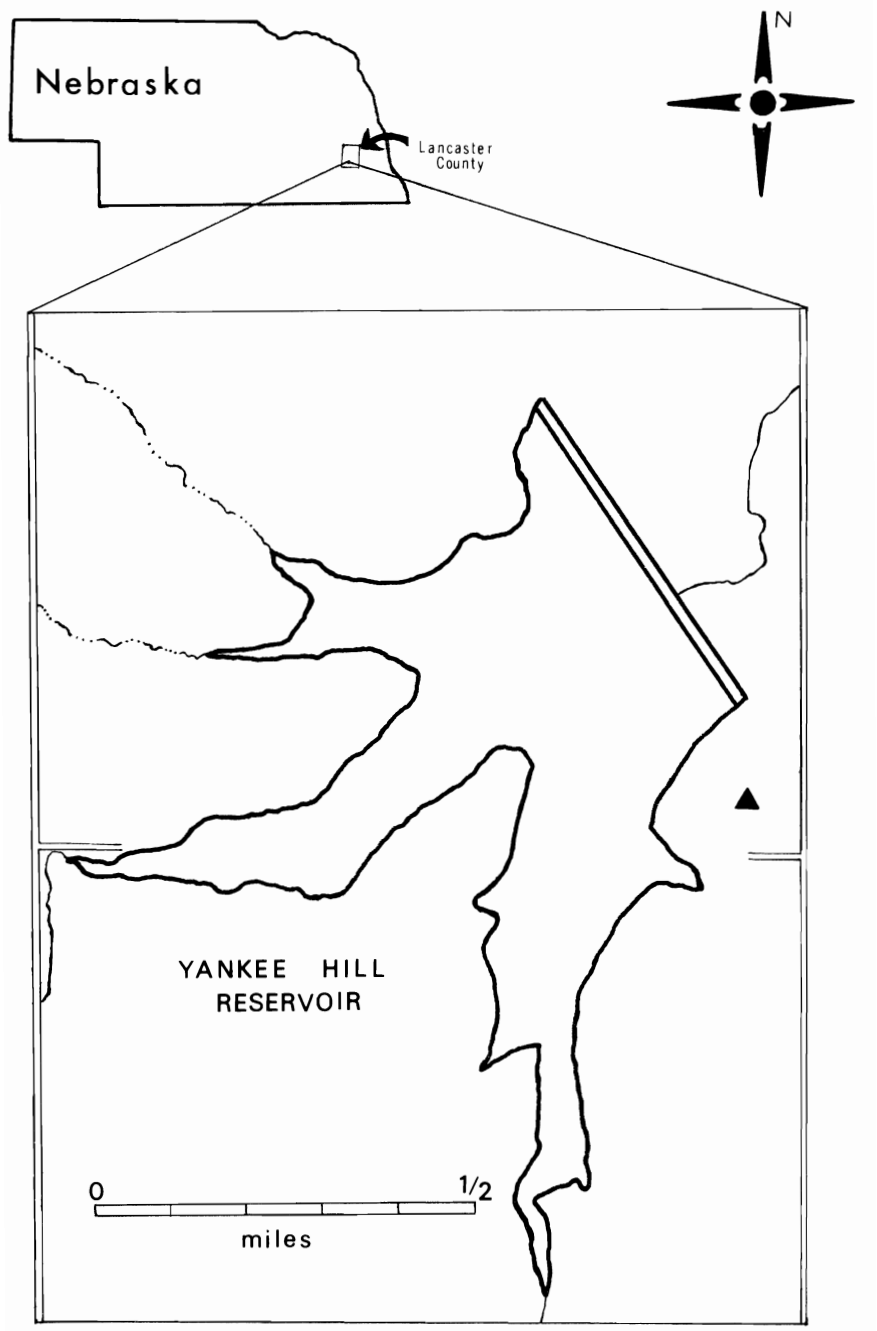


Figure 1. Map of the study area on Yankee Hill reservoir. The triangle on the east side of the reservoir indicates the vantage point from which most observations were made.

cludes northern watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum exalbescens*), sago pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*), and floating pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*). Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) seedlings have invaded much of the periphery of the reservoir. The role of the vegetation in providing cover for waterfowl during the study period was negligible because it had not grown up yet. Submerged vegetation appeared to provide an ample food supply.

Public access to this reservoir was somewhat restricted with no improved roads leading to the waters edge. Outboard motors are not allowed on the lake. This enhances the reservoir as a waterfowl resting area.

METHODS

Observations were made from a point on the east side of the reservoir of sufficient height to enable us to view nearly the entire surface of the water. Two distant inlets which had considerable amount of vegetation often had to be checked by driving around to the west side of the reservoir. Three spotting scopes (32x, 20-40x, and 20-60x zoom) were used to count every bird on the shore and in the water. Each bird was identified to species and sex. No attempt was made to census those waterfowl feeding in nearby fields or flying in the vicinity of the reservoir. Censuses were made between 0700 and 0830 every Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday except during the period between 28 March and 3 April when only one count was made (Friday, 3 April). Counts were initiated on 1 March when the ice went off the reservoir and ended 29 April when the size of flocks utilizing the reservoir had dwindled to one or two pairs of birds.

It is likely that some individuals remained at the lake through more than one count day. Since it was impossible to identify such individuals, we tabulated totals as "waterfowl-days" rather than as individual waterfowl. For ease of discussion of a particular count's total however, the use of number of individuals is still retained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 10,077 waterfowl-days were counted during the eight weeks of study. Of this total 1,669 waterfowl-days were counted for geese and 8,378 waterfowl-days for ducks. Three species of geese and 17 species of ducks were observed.

Figure 2 shows the peaks of migration for the geese observed on Yankee Hill Reservoir. Most of the geese were flying overhead by the time we arrived in the morning, so it is very likely that we missed some of those which had rested on the reservoir the previous night. The geese present on our arrival usually remained for the entire observation period, and occasionally a small flock came in to rest during this time. We counted 934 waterfowl-days for Canada Geese on 16 days during the study period (average 58), and found three peaks of migration; two in March and a lesser peak in mid-April. White-fronted Geese were observed on eight days during the study period (89 waterfowl-days). This species probably never showed the sharp peaks seen in the other geese because of their small numbers (average 11) but they clearly show their greatest abundance in mid-March with a gradual decrease to mid-April. We counted 676 waterfowl-days for Snow Geese on seven days during the study period (average 97) with two definite peaks noted, both of which were in March. The ratio of Snow to Blue phases for the study was 2.6 : 1. Because most of the spring flight corridors for this species focus on the Missouri River (Bellrose, 1968) we probably observed only those geese on the fringes of this corridor.

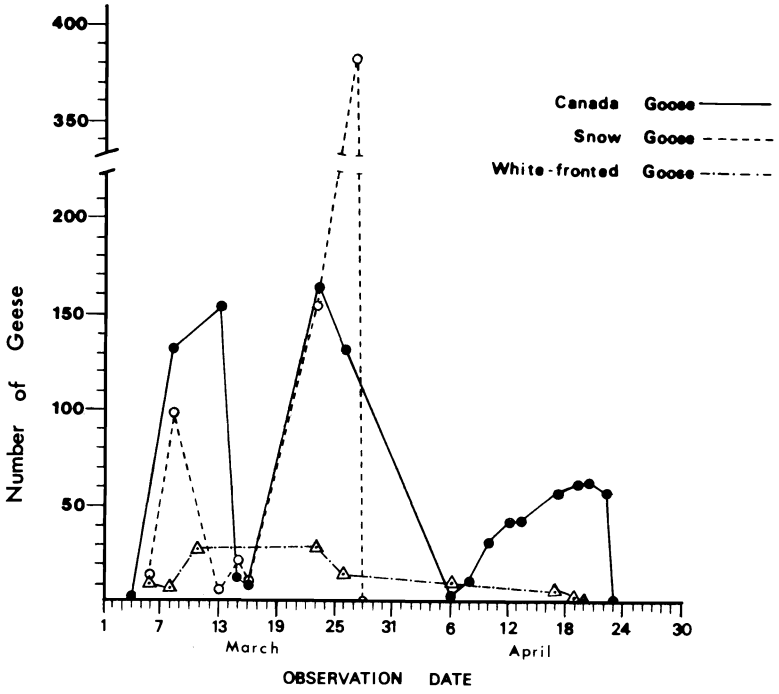


Figure 2. Peaks of the goose migration on Yankee Hill reservoir during the spring of 1970. Circles and triangles indicate actual numbers seen on a given day; connecting lines indicate trends only, not actual values for intermediate dates.

The numbers of geese observed appeared to be partly a function of reservoir size as well as degree of human disturbance. On two days of the study when small numbers of geese (15-30) were observed on Yankee Hill, large flocks of geese (100-150) were observed on Branched Oak Reservoir, about 17 miles NNW of Yankee Hill. This lake is about nine times as large as Yankee Hill and, until better access made human disturbance a factor, it drew far larger groups of resting geese and ducks. The proportions of one species to another on Branched Oak were surprisingly similar to those of Yankee Hill. Pawnee Reservoir, on the other hand, which is over three times as large as Yankee Hill had only a few small groups of geese during the entire study period. It is very accessible to human use in all types of weather and thus provides little resting area for geese.

Figure 3 shows the peaks of migration for the three most common species of dabbling ducks. We counted 1,182 waterfowl-days for Mallards on 23 days of the study period (average 51), with three main peaks occurring, all in March. We observed 689 waterfowl-days for Pintails on 18 days of the study period (average 38) with two definite peaks occurring in early March. It is obvious from the records of surrounding wildlife refuges that much of the migration of Mallards and Pintails occurs in February as well as March, so we undoubtedly missed several peaks of migration for these species. The

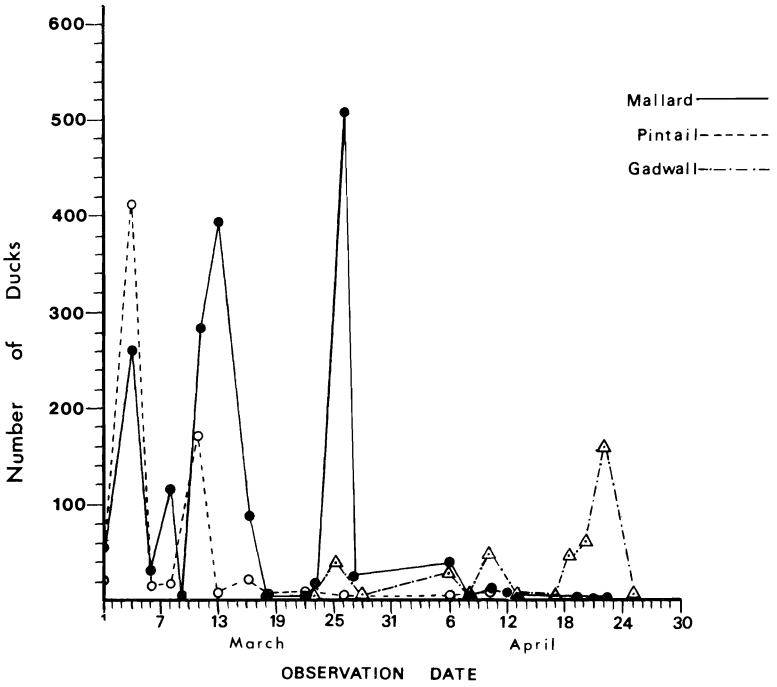


Figure 3. Peaks of migration for the most abundant species of dabbling ducks. Symbols and lines as in Fig. 2.

Gadwall was counted on 21 days of the study period (a total of 513 waterfowl-days). The sample seems small when drawn out over a long period of time but there does appear to be one definite peak which falls during mid-April.

Several other surface feeding ducks were observed whose small numbers didn't justify graphical analysis. These are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on species of less abundant dabblers:

Species	Waterfowl-days Counted	First Observed	Last Observed	Peak Date	Peak Number
Green-winged Teal	235	8 Mar	22 Apr	22 Apr	61
Blue-winged Teal	386	15 Mar	29 Apr	22 Apr	188
American Wigeon	412	1 Mar	29 Apr	26 Mar	134
Shoveler	343	6 Mar	29 Apr	22 Apr	80
Wood Duck	7	16 Mar	19 Apr	16 Mar	5

The peaks of migration for the two most common species of diving ducks are shown in Figure 4. The Canvasback was the most abundant duck during the study and the graph of its numbers shows five distinct peaks. The biggest peak occurred in late March. We observed 3,287 waterfowl-days for Canvasbacks during 25 days of the study period (average 131). Yankee Hill appeared to be the only one of seven reservoirs we looked at that had such a large number of Canvasbacks. The closest to it was Branched Oak which had perhaps one-fourth as many Canvasbacks on the same given day. We observed

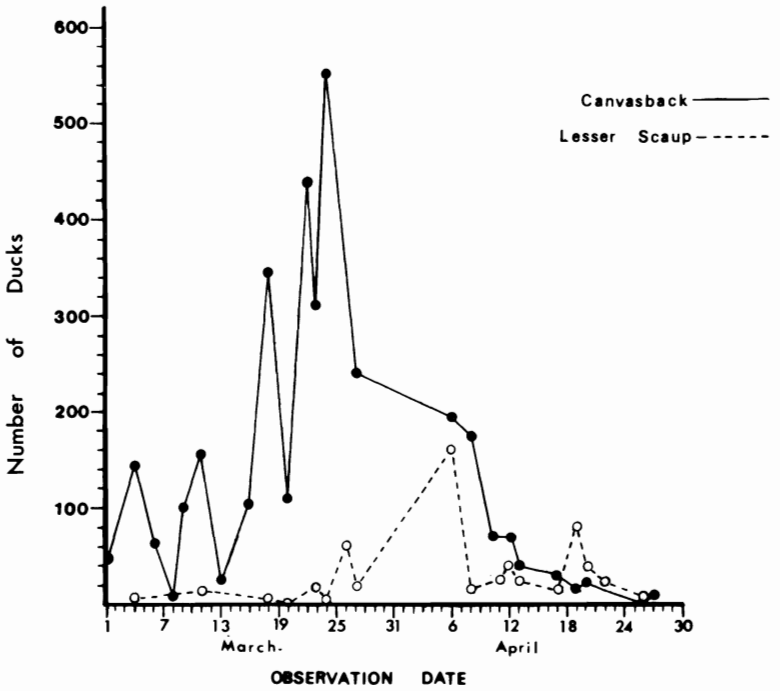


Figure 4. Peaks of migration for the most abundant species of diving ducks. Symbols and lines as in Fig. 2.

a total of 539 waterfowl-days for Lesser Scaup during 20 days of the study (average 27). Peaks were not readily apparent except for the large one that occurred during the first part of April. The peak of migration for this species seemed to occur after that of the Canvasbacks was nearly over.

Smaller numbers of other species of diving ducks and mergansers were observed that were not graphed. To give some indication of their relative abundance with respect to the other species of waterfowl this data is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Data on the less numerous diving ducks and mergansers on Yankee Hill Reservoir.

Species	Waterfowl-days Counted	First Observed	Last Observed	Peak Date	Peak Number
Redhead	49	6 Mar	26 Apr	23 Mar	9
Ring-necked Duck	153	1 Mar	22 Apr	13 Mar	33
Common Goldeneye	7	13 Mar	16 Mar	16 Mar	6
Bufflehead	134	4 Mar	29 Apr	22 Apr	21
Ruddy Duck	185	18 Mar	27 Apr	20 Apr	39
Common Merganser	235	1 Mar	22 Apr	8 Mar	39
Red-br. Merganser	22	23 Mar	20 Apr	12 Mar	10

Very few Redheads were observed in relation to the numbers seen on other reservoirs. Pawnee Reservoir, for instance, usually had flocks of 25-100 Redheads at the same time we were observing three to six birds on Yankee

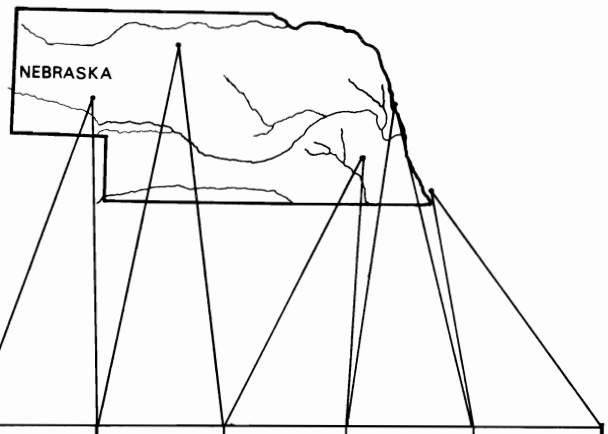
Hill. Whether this was due to association among members of the same species, feeding conditions, or some other factor was not discernable. We also noticed the same situation with Goldeneyes on the same two reservoirs.

COMPARISONS WITH REFUGES

One of the things we wished to do with our data was to compare it with that of wildlife refuges to the west and east of our study area. We obtained censuses from the refuges, but unfortunately they were not directly comparable with each other or with our data. Census techniques, dates, and frequency of censuses vary from refuge to refuge. In addition it appears that these censuses may be biased in favor of the more abundant species (e.g. Snow Geese on the Missouri River refuges). In spite of these difficulties, it was decided that some idea of distributions of species during spring migration might be gained by showing the relative composition of the total number of waterfowl recorded for each refuge. The results of this portrayal are shown in Figure 5. Unfortunately, this way of looking at the data still offers no satisfactory means of comparing species abundance because the percentage of any one species is determined by the relative numbers of the other species. However, it does show the most abundant species for each refuge and the absence of species. This is sufficient to make some general comments on distribution of species in Nebraska during spring migration.

The movement of Snow Geese, for example, appears to be oncentrated in the Missouri River valley, is notably absent from central Nebraska, and appears again in western Nebraska. This may be a reflection of the two routes, eastern and western, observed in the fall (Cooch,F. in Linduska, 1964). The movement of White-fronted Geese seems to be largely confined to the eastern half of the state, which is in agreement with the map of Miller and Schildman (in Linduska, 1964) outlining migration stops for this species. The Black Duck and Hooded Merganser appear to be most frequently observed in the eastern one-fourth of the state. Gadwall appear to be most abundant in the center of Nebraska but this may simply reflect the absence of large numbers of geese in the Valentine censuses that are present in refuges to the east and west. Ring-necked Ducks seem to be the most common in central and eastern Nebraska. Duvall (in Aldrich, 1949) shows that recoveries of this species banded in winter in Louisiana indicate that Ring-neck Duck spring migration is about equally split between the eastern half of Nebraska and western Iowa. Although Redheads appear to be most abundant in the western part of the state this may be an artifact of relative numbers of other species. Very little is known about spring migration routes for the Redhead (Weller, 1964). The same can be said of the Canvasback. Although Stewart et al. (1958) note that fall densities throughout Nebraska are approximately equal, whether or not this holds true in spring is not known. Suitability of resting areas for a particular species certainly must influence the results of censuses as much as established routes of travel. For example, the large number of Canvasbacks on Yankee Hill probably represents a suitable resting area to which the ducks were drawn and where flocks continued to grow over a number of days. Although the patterns of distribution expressed here have been sketchy, they are interesting nonetheless.

It is important to stress in conclusion that little has been said about the random errors that come from sampling such a small area. It may be largely a matter of chance that a flock of a particular species selects a reservoir as a place to rest. Similarly, once a "seed" flock has settled on the lake it may



Species	Cresent Lake NWR	Valentine NWR	Yankee Hill Reservoir	DeSoto NWR	Squaw Creek NWR
Trumpeter Swan	-	0.01	-	-	-
Canada Goose	10.35	0.19	8.67	4.05	2.67
White-fronted Goose	-	-	0.83	1.05	0.44
Snow Goose	10.65	-	6.27	41.03	80.01
Mallard	3.22	12.70	17.47	48.29	5.09
Black Duck	-	-	-	-	0.02
Gadwall	3.22	25.44	4.76	0.03	0.62
Pintail	2.43	3.26	6.39	1.22	2.03
Green-winged Teal	3.93	2.55	2.18	0.18	3.08
Blue-winged Teal	0.72	3.83	3.57	0.06	3.22
American Wigeon	5.51	3.60	3.84	1.28	0.67
Shoveler	5.34	10.51	3.18	0.24	2.02
Wood Duck	-	-	0.06	0.04	0.01
Redhead	33.39	3.59	0.45	0.02	+
Ring-necked Duck	0.19	1.89	1.42	0.01	0.01
Canvasback	2.60	3.09	30.45	0.11	+
Lesser Scaup	14.46	17.14	5.00	0.10	0.08
Common Goldeneye	1.07	0.07	0.06	0.03	-
Bufflehead	1.16	7.38	1.26	0.02	+
Ruddy Duck	1.43	4.15	1.72	0.01	0.02
Hooded Merganser	-	-	-	0.03	+
Common Merganser	0.25	0.59	2.18	2.24	0.01
Red-breasted Merganser	0.05	-	0.20	-	+

Figure 5. The percent composition of total waterfowl-days recorded at Yankee Hill reservoir and four nearby national wildlife refuges during the spring of 1970. Columns may not add to 100.00 because of rounding.

induce others of the same species to land. Daily fluctuations occur undetected with the schedule we employed. Great yearly fluctuations can occur (Low, 1941). Hopefully a study in the near future will attempt to include more reservoirs in the sample, census more frequently, and census over a period of several years. The present study furnishes a place to start and the data for future comparisons.

SUMMARY

The results of censusing the waterfowl populations using a reservoir in Lancaster County during the spring of 1970 are presented. Twenty species of waterfowl were observed; a total of 10,077 waterfowl-days. Peaks of migration were noted for the most abundant species. Total numbers, peak numbers, and peak dates for all species were tabulated. Canvasbacks were the most abundant species observed, perhaps a reflection of optimum resting and feeding area provided by the reservoir. Relative abundance of each species using the reservoir and several refuges in the state during the spring of 1970 were tabulated but no comparisons could be made. An approximation of migratory routes for some of the species of waterfowl using this tabulated material was also attempted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our thanks to Harold Burgess of Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Don R. Perkuchin of Cresent Lake NWR, Ronald D. Shupe of Valentine NWR, and the staff of DeSoto NWR for their help in securing data on the 1970 spring migration. George Schildman of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission was helpful in familiarizing us with the waterfowl studies undertaken by the state biologists.

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MERLIN NEST IN NEBRASKA

On 13 June 1975, while we were examining a Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) nest on Fort Robinson State Park, a male Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) was observed flying across a small canyon formed by a line of sheer buttes on three sides. The Merlin's bluish-gray back and prominently barred tail, along with typical falcon features, were clearly evident. The male flew to the side of a female perched in a dead tree. There was considerable

vocalization on the part of both birds. Within a few minutes the female flew to a nest near the top of a large ponderosa pine tree about 85 yards directly below the butte on which we were standing. There were two eggs in the neatly shaped, cupped nest made of small sticks. Light conditions were not the best to determine accurately the color of the eggs, but they appeared to be brownish-buff with shades of chestnut. The nest was well concealed and would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to locate had it not been for presence of the female.

It could not be fully determined whether or not the clutch had been completed, since the Merlin may lay from three to six eggs, with four or five considered normal. A second check of the nest conducted two days later revealed no additional eggs. Time did not permit another nest inspection to determine if further egg laying occurred or to determine hatching success.

According to Rapp et al, *Revised Checklist of Nebraska Birds*, 1958, the Merlin is classified as a rare migrant throughout the state. Since no documentation of nesting Merlins could be found in the literature (dating back to about 1900), this case is believed to be the first that has been verified and recorded in Nebraska.

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A GROOVE-BILLED ANI SEEN AGAIN IN NEBRASKA

About 5:00 PM on 15 October 1975 I was working in my garden, when I saw a bird sitting in one of my wild plum bushes around the outside of the garden. I saw the bird again the next morning, and called Bill Schleicher and Vera Coons. They came out and observed it from about 11:00 AM to noon. At first we thought that it was a Smooth-billed Ani because we couldn't see the grooves with our binoculars, but with Vera's telescope we

could see the grooves on the bill very clearly and identified it as a Groove-billed Ani. On 18 October Bruce Wiseman, who is with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, came out and took a number of pictures. The last time I saw the bird was 1 November.

The bird flew rather slowly and awkwardly. It spent a lot of time on the ground and in the lower tree branches. Numerous times I observed this bird, in and around my garden, eating lots of grasshoppers and some strawberries. It was also in my mulberry and wild plum trees. To my knowledge, the bird didn't sing or make much of a sound.

The bird was about 14 inches long, with a tail around 7 inches long. Its main color was black, with greenish cast. It had numerous small greenish markings on the upper wings and back. The bill was large, thick, and curved. The bill was a grayish color, which extended around the eye section.

Our farm is about 3 miles east of Grand Island.

— *George W. Stoppkotte*

(A Groove-billed Ani was seen at Elgin, Antelope County, in the fall of 1952. *NBR* 21:2, *Revised Checklist of Nebraska Birds*, p. 13 Ed.)

A BROWN CREEPER'S NEST IN NEBRASKA

A Brown Creeper's nest, which Chief Naturalist D. Andrew Saunders and I took for the Fontenelle Forest Nature Center on 24 July 1975, seems to be the first such nest reported in recent years. The presence of a Creeper's nest in the Forest was no surprise to local observers. Ruth Green, of Bellevue, had seen Brown Creepers carrying food during the nesting period in 1974 and in 1975, and Creepers were present during all of 1974. Mrs. Fitzhugh Diggs, of Hamburg, Iowa, reported that they and the John Otts of Lincoln, on 16 July 1974, "netted and banded a Brown Creeper. We recorded it as an after-hatching-year, sex unknown. The bird had a brood spot, so for our own records it was a female. Not knowing for sure whether both sexes incubate the eggs we sent it to the office in Maryland as an unknown as far as sex was concerned. The band number is 1320-58156." And in 1975, before the present nest was discovered, Clyde and Emma Johnson, of Omaha, spent may be half an hour watching a Brown Creeper bringing sticks to a nesting site under a piece of loose bark. Unfortunately they could not locate the tree on later visits to the Forest.

On 26 May 1975 I found the Johnsons by the stream in the Forest, a little below the beaver dam and the footbridge. (The "stick-carrying" had been seen farther upstream, and the mist-netting was done along the road, which crosses the stream even farther upstream.) While we were talking Mrs. Johnson pointed to a Brown Creeper rather close to us. It had food in its beak, and acted in an agitated manner. We moved away maybe 20 feet, and almost immediately the bird went under a piece of loose bark on a long-dead stub, presumably elm. Shortly thereafter a Creeper flew out, followed almost immediately by another. Mr. Johnson noted that one was carrying something white, presumably a fecal sac. There was no more activity for a little while, and I went on. About two to three hours later I came by the site again, but saw no activity, nor did I see any activity there on 8 June or later visits. At the time the nest was found I tried to look under the bark but it was too tightly curled against the trunk to see anything without moving the bark, and I didn't want to risk that. Had I tried to look under from the other side (right hand in the picture) I might have been more successful.

The writer pointing to the location of the nest, before any attempt had been made to remove the nest.

The nest was about six feet off the ground (but, as Bent says, under the lowest part of the loose bark). A one-inch thick vine of poison ivy ran over the outside of the piece, and here were two smaller vine under the piece, which was just part of a much larger sheet of bark on a dead elm (?). A lot of bulky material - much of it apparently grape bark - was below the typical crescent-shaped nest, made of much finer material which gave a smooth surface. It was long and narrow, much like a hammock. The nest tree was situated in the Missouri bottoms. Cottonwoods were the dominant trees in the area, and there was considerable undergrowth, both small trees and shrubs, and annual plants.

The *AOU Check-list* gives the breeding area of the Brown Creeper as extending to "southeastern Nebraska (Red Cloud, Lincoln, Omaha" Bent's *Life Histories*, in discussing the Creeper's use of knot-holes for nesting sites when loose bark is not available, quotes Professor Samuel Aughey's reports of finding nests in box-elder knot-holes. In June 1877 he found one "between Bellevue and Omaha, on the Missouri Bluffs" (roughly the same location as the present nest), and he found one later "on Middle Creek, 4 miles from Lincoln". He had found several others in the more typical location, under loose bark.

The photographs were taken by Chief Naturalist Saunders.

—*W. G. Cortelyou, Omaha*

The piece of bark pulled back to show the nest. The camera was pointing about 45° from the sun, and while the light was sufficient for the eye to see the nest easily, it was not enough for the camera. The "X" of the light sticks can be related to the same sticks in the photograph of the nest itself for orientation.

The inside of the piece of bark on which the nest was built. The nest itself is to the right of and slightly below the tops of the light-colored sticks on the left of the picture, above the rough material used as fill.

FIRST PLEISTOCENE RECORD OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE FROM THE CENTRAL GREAT PLAINS

A partial skelton of the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (Linnaeus), consisting of two tibiotarsi with fibulae, three vertebrae, and the head of a rib (University of Nebraska State Museum 46005) was recovered near Rock Creek Lake, Dundy County, Nebraska, SW/4, SW/4, T2N, R39W. The specimen was collected from a buff to tan, fine, silty, unconsolidated sand of post-Wisconsin age. This sand fills a draw cut into and lying unconformably on Pliocene sediments of the Ash Hollow Formation, Ogallala Group. The end-Tertiary surface in this area is largely obscured by Pleistocene sand dunes which form part of the upper margin of the draw. The matrix from which the partial skeleton of *A. chrysaetos* was collected, four feet below the surface of the fill, is reworked from this dune deposit.

The tibiotarsi fall well within the size range of modern *Aquila chrysaetos*. Unfortunately, none of the elements Howard (1947) found useful in distinguishing the Pleistocene population of *Aquila chrysaetos* at Rancho La Brea from the modern form was present in the Nebraska specimen.

Though the Golden Eagle is still found in Nebraska today, the present fossil record is the first Pleistocene record of the genus from the central Great Plains, although Miller (1961) reported *A. chrysaetos* from a prehistoric site in North Dakota. To the south, the species has been recorded from two Pleistocene sites in Texas (Brodkorb, 1964).

I am grateful to Larry D. Martin, University of Kansas Museum of Natural History, for his assistance in the identification of the eagle; and to John A. Breyer, Texas Christian University Department of Geology, who helped collect the specimen.

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NOTES

BOBWHITE IN KEARNEY. The center of a city the size of Kearney is hardly a place where one would expect to find Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*). Yet on 11 July 1973, about 4:00 P.M., as I was doing some work in our garage, I heard two or three covey calls that sounded very close by. I went outside to investigate, but heard no further calls and I could not find the bird. About twenty minutes later, my wife having joined me in the meanwhile, the bird called again. We stopped our work at once, and just as we left the garage we saw the bird flush from our flower bed and fly westward. Then another Bobwhite gave an answering call to the northeast of us, probably a block away. Our final observation for the day came about 15 minutes later when we heard two birds calling in the block west of us.

On 21 July we had another surprise. I had opened the doors of our garage about 9:00 A.M. and returned to the house. When I went out again at 9:15 A.M. and approached the garage I was amazed to see a male Bob-

white sitting on the top of our car. After my wife and I watched it for a few minutes we decided not to disturb the bird, but to see how long it might stay. We checked on it every few minutes from our back door, from which it was plainly visible. It appeared to be asleep most of the time. It left about 10:00 A.M., when we were not watching, having stayed a full 45 minutes. It never made a sound during its stay, and we heard no calls either before it arrived or after it left.

These incidents caused us to recall that we had had this species in our neighborhood before. A search through my notes showed that on 3 October 1963 we saw a Bobwhite running back and forth on the ridgepole of the roof of our neighbor's house, giving its covey call. Several birds in the vicinity gave answering calls but remained out of sight. These birds apparently stayed in Kearney for several days, for on 7 October we heard a covey call to the west of us, not more than half a block away, and on 10 October I saw a Bobwhite near the Student Union of Kearney State College, roughly a mile west of our home. —*John C. W. Bliese, Kearney*

WHOOPING CRANES. Nine Whooping Cranes came down in bad weather on the Sacramento-Wilcox Game Management Area 18 April 1975. The area was dangerous because of an outbreak of avian cholera which had killed around 15,000 waterfowl this spring, and Federal and State wildlife officials didn't want to risk infection of the cranes. So they got permission to disturb the birds and succeeded in shooting them off the area in a day or so (using a plane, among other things). Apparently none caught the disease, for Canadian officials reported that the nine had all arrived at Wood Buffalo National Park. The disease typically would have manifested itself before they got there if they had caught it. The publicity given to the case contrasts with the previous policy of secrecy. In his talk at the 1975 Annual Meeting Gene Miller said that the secrecy policy had been abandoned and that in the future we could expect to learn about the presence of Whooping Cranes while they were still in the area.

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